

## Helen Swenson and the Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park

**Helen Swenson** and her husband, Ben Swenson, managed the Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park from 1936 to 1948. The Potawatomi Inn was built in 1927 in a Mediterranean-inspired style with stucco walls and a red tile roof.

Ben Swenson was hired to manage Potawatomi Inn in 1936 after operating a hotel in Chicago. Pokagon State Park's interpretive naturalist, Fred Wooley, writes that while "Ben may have been the actual manager, it was his wife, Helen Aldrich Swenson who gave the inn much of its personal touch. Helen loved life, and she loved for people to have a good time."



Helen was a talented artist. She studied at Chicago Art Institute in the early 1930s. In 1937, she drew a beautiful map of the park that was used as a trail map for visitors. Helen also drew promotional materials for the park, emphasizing the park's winter sports. But her talents extended beyond art. She was also an avid naturalist, leading bird hikes and teaching guests about trees and wildflowers. After their

time at Potawatomi Inn, the Swensons moved on to manage Wing Haven Resort, located across the highway from Pokagon State Park. The site of this resort is now Trine State Recreation Area, which opened to the public in 2013. The Swenson Lodge at Trine SRA is named for her. Helen Swenson died in 1983 at the age of 76, leaving a wonderful legacy for Potawatomi Inn, Pokagon State Park, and Trine State Recreation Area.

